

ARTICLE

H. P. Lovecraft's Weird Tale Ideal: Angela Carter's New Weird Dystopia

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ABSTRACT: This paper critiques whether H. P. Lovecraft's Old Weird standards remain relevant to the ways in which women writing the New Weird resist and/or transform the Lovecraftian weird tale ideal. Lovecraft explains that there must be particular attention taken in order to achieve the great desideratum of Weird Fiction: Lovecraftian aura of cosmic horror achieves the strange reality of the unreal. This elevation of Lovecraft has produced a scholarship that tends to discuss an Old canon exclusively authored by men, silencing the work of women writers within the genre, and sidelining women's dystopias as examples of masculine authority and fear. The aim of this discussion is to identify women's grotesque bodies within the New as depicted by Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972). Through this, I aim to reveal how women writers are rewriting Old phallogocentrism in a way that achieves generating a critical and creative feminist dystopia.

KEYWORDS: English literature, women's writing, Weird Fiction, feminist criticism, gender, H. P. Lovecraft, Angela Carter

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INTRODUCTION

The critical gaze upon Weird Fiction has silenced the work of women writers.¹ Consequently, women writers have been sidelined as examples of minor voices engaging in incidental acts of literary criticism and contribution to the field of Weird Fiction. This discussion aims to rupture the phallogocentrism of current scholarship,² which reifies Howard Phillips Lovecraft's ideas to define itself, or, more critically, relies on Lovecraft's Weird tale ideal as a sufficient definition of the genre.³ Although Weird Fiction has gained recognition in literary criticism, its phallogocentric concepts have limited discussion to an Old Weird ideological foundation and produced a masculinist scholarship and canon. This claim is not meant to rebuff Weird Fiction criticism but, rather, to serve as a conceptual lens for examining the New Weird.⁴ In this article I investigate women's voices and women characters in Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) under the same principle; that is, the positioning of women's writing as a conceptual lens for examining the Old's reflection onto the New.

Despite feminist critiques' extensive examinations of grotesque bodies, there has been little feminist critical gaze extended to Weird Fiction, particularly the New. The aim of this discussion is therefore to uncover and identify women and women's bodies within the New Weird, as depicted by Carter's dystopian novel. I aim to reveal and underscore how women writers are occupying and radically altering Weird Fiction in a way that not only radicalises the New, but reframes Old phallogocentrism, as well as generating a critical and creative *écriture féminine*.

WEIRD FICTION

When we examine Weird Fiction texts, we as readers expect to deal with a text that is indeed Weird. To read Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines* in the context of Weird Fiction as a genre offers a very different reading than that of a science fiction or gothic reading.⁵ It is important to note, however, that these genres are not absent from Carter's novel, rather they are exemplified in Weird Fiction's ability to cross their many boundaries. It is for this reason that the critical scholarship, like Michael Kelly,

insist that Weird Fiction is not a genre it “is a mode of literature that is present in other genres,” and any definition would therefore be “difficult, and perhaps ill-advised.”⁶ At this initial entry point of discussion, however, we first require a definition of Weird Fiction before we can proceed with investigating the issue of phallogocentrism. Therefore, let us proceed in seeking answer to this “ill-advised” question: What is Weird Fiction?

In critical scholarship, Weird Fiction begins with the Old. What the Old presents is a separate “mode” of writing that first appeared in the pulp fiction era between the years of 1880 and 1940, seeing publications in the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*. The New on the other hand, as described by Noys and Murphy, is “a period from the 1980s to the present that gained its most explicit articulation in the 2000s,” and which brought with it “a shift toward more mainstream publishing and, in the work of [China] Miéville and Jeff VanderMeer, away from the short story or novella format preferred by the Old Weird writers to the novel form.”⁷ This forty year gap between the Old and New saw a critical reorientation both in terms of scholarship and writing to expand Lovecraftian homage. The unmarked gap between the Old and New suggests not necessarily a death of Weird Fiction but a rejection of Lovecraft’s work, and thus his Weird tale ideal. Establishing a new canon that embodies and reflects an “anti-manifesto” was, and continues to be, paramount in disconnecting the New from the Lovecraftian limitations of the (Old) Weird. Significantly, the critical scholarship has concerned itself exclusively with definition and ownership of the New definition.

Michael Moorcock’s definition in Ann and Jeff VanderMeers’ *The Weird; A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories* (2011) can be seen as an example of the critical scholarship disconnecting the New from the Old. I would like to focus on the way that Moorcock’s New definition directs the reader to approach Weird stories.

For me, the appeal of the weird story is precisely that it is designed to disturb. At least if left to itself. Maybe all we can really say about it is that it suits a certain mood in the reader; that it’s subtler and more complex than generic fantasy stories.⁸

The inclusion of Moorcock's definition in the "Foreweird" in the VanderMeers' collection frames it as highly relevant to understanding the included Weird stories. This placement guides the reader to approach these characteristics as integral to the Weird and respond to the stories through this conceptual prism. Moorcock proceeds to state that the VanderMeers' anthology showcases "the best weird stories" and lists "Bradbury, Kafka, Lovecraft ..., Borges, Leiber, Angela Carter, Chabon."⁹ As these authors' works are included in the anthology it not only implies that they are the best Weird writers, but that the best Weird stories are achieved through Moorcock's definition. The reader is thereby directed by Moorcock to approach both the Old and New writers with this standard, a New standard that disconnects itself from the Old. This way of approaching Weird Fiction is however contradictory when compared to the definitions that rely on Lovecraft's ideas, which we will soon discuss. It is important to note here that although he overlooks other Weird women writers like Daphne Du Maurier, Shirley Jackson and Octavia Butler, Moorcock's inclusion of Carter alongside male writers is significant. These women writers, amongst others, are significant contributors to the Weird. Moreover, their works are included in the VanderMeers' anthology. I will return to this as it highlights feminist concerns of minor voices or incidental acts of contribution to the field.¹⁰ Moorcock's definition is important to investigate and build upon in order to achieve a firmer sense of what constitutes a text as Weird.

It is interesting to compare Moorcock's definition of Weird Fiction with other critical efforts. Take for example Ann and Jeff VanderMeers' Introduction to the same anthology, in which they assert that "a 'weird tale', as defined by H. P. Lovecraft ... is a story that has a supernatural element but does not fall into the category of traditional ghost story of gothic tale."¹¹ Lovecraft's authority and dominance is positioned in front of the definition here, suggesting as Mark Fisher does in his book *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016), that "any discussion of weird fiction must begin with Lovecraft."¹² Moreover, writes Fisher, "it is not horror but *fascination*—albeit a fascination usually mixed within a certain trepidation—that is integral to Lovecraft's rendition of the weird."¹³ At the centre of these definitions is Lovecraft. This is why we see the critical

scholarship relying on the Lovecraftian aura of cosmic horror to define Weird Fiction, implying that it is *his* standards that must be met in the New.

In his essay “Notes on Writing Weird Fiction” (1937), Lovecraft described his own approach when writing Weird Fiction, specifically his “Cthulhu Mythos” fiction:

Atmosphere, not action, is the great desideratum of weird fiction. Indeed, all that a wonder story can ever be is *a vivid picture of a certain type of human mood*. The moment it tries to be anything else it becomes cheap, puerile, and unconvincing. Prime emphasis should be given to *subtle* suggestion—imperceptible hints and touches of selective associative detail which express shadings of moods and build up a vague illusion of the strange reality of the unreal.¹⁴

Paying particular attention to Lovecraft's wording—“mood,” “atmosphere,” “illusion,” “strange reality,” and “unreal”—becomes an important point of reference when considering the modern scholarship's attempt to re-define Lovecraft's Weird tale ideal. Lovecraft's statement about Weird Fiction's “desideratum” was the first attempt to define or definitely describe Weird Fiction, and this is inevitably what the scholarship relies upon. Sunand Tryambak Joshi describes Lovecraft's fiction as a “watershed” for this reason.¹⁵ Although Lovecraft's work was once dismissed for appearing “in the cheap pulp magazines ... he has become an icon in popular culture in part *because* his work appeared there.”¹⁶ Joshi goes on to remind us that Lovecraft's publications in *Weird Tales* were included due to the themes in his work, rather than intentionally Weird. Lovecraft's attempts to define Weird Fiction were written as a defence of his work “being banished from mainstream venues.”¹⁷ At the time, however, Lovecraft's Weird tale ideal was understood as a moment of incursion against these mainstream venues. James Fabian Machin points out that the Weird tale ideal only later founded a “recrudescence of weird fiction and the naissance of the ‘New Weird’ ... a philosophical vogue which enthusiastically used Lovecraft as a literary springboard for the development of—particularly—phenomenological discourse.”¹⁸ In

so doing, the body of Weird Fiction scholarship saw Lovecraft pioneering a new style of writing that was “not necessarily good in the opinion of its day.”¹⁹

Old Weird authors, who published their works at the same time as Lovecraft, struggled to defend the burgeoning Weird tale against an Anglo-American literature that was concerned with social realism and dominated by writers like Dickens, Eliot and Thackeray. An exemplar of these authors, amongst the few who published such defensive essays in *Weird Tales*, was Otis Adelbert Kline in 1924, who was “compelled to explain [the] ‘why’” of Weird Fiction despite being conscious of “contributing to a genre whose characteristics had yet to be adequately outlined.”²⁰ It was Lovecraft who became the centre of the field, or as Ben P. Indick has recognised, “if Poe was the Newton of the weird tale, Lovecraft was its Einstein, bringing it into the Atomic Age.”²¹ In other words, Lovecraft was successful in not only defining Weird Fiction, but also fundamental in generating further critical interest in a Weird movement.

Lovecraft’s influence and success, however, is where the critical scholarship disagrees. After Lovecraft’s death in 1937, the critical scholarship saw a “decline in the quality of weird writing.”²² Trevor Owen Jones adds to this claim, suggesting that Weird Fiction had not just died but “moved on to new realms” and formed “the deliberately subversive and cliché-defiant umbrella term ‘New Weird’ [which] subsisted as a signal that something new was happening in speculative fiction.”²³ If the New is the product of a modern speculative fiction, it is one inspired by overcoming the limitations of Lovecraftian homage, a characteristic of the Old. These limitations are, as Benjamin Noys discusses, highlighted by high modernism set on a “direct confrontation and replication of the racist and anti-Semitic strategies of the Old.”²⁴ The New aims to mix “high modernism and the weird” in order to produce “a new form of collage ‘text’ that destabilises both, probing the toxic core of anti-Semitism and racism that links them together,” while simultaneously “remain[ing] active.”²⁵ This poses a crucial dilemma for the critical scholarship: if the New’s aim is to establish itself as independent of, or a radical break from the Old, how does it unshackle itself from Lovecraft’s critical arguments if, at the same time, his racist and misogynistic notions of Weird Fiction are treated as the ideological and aesthetic

foundation of the genre? How does the New separate itself from the Lovecraftian Weird when current scholarship rejects it as a genre proper?

To propose my own definition, then, would perhaps add to the contradictory dilemma in modern scholarship. For this reason, I will offer instead a working definition of Weird Fiction, one that encompasses a linking theme across texts that are constituted to be Weird. In all these attempts of definition, all of which rely upon Lovecraft's Weird tale idea of "atmosphere" and "mood," there is a common threshold that is being engaged with but not fully grasped and understood. It is a Weird threshold. The Weird threshold appears as the hesitation, the overwhelming questioning of reality that confronts the narrator and reader, articulated more acutely when the ambiguous or disturbing "thing" is never acknowledged as real, symbolic, or imaginary.

The Weird threshold is notably different from fantastic definitions that rely upon this hesitation, such as Tzvetan Todorov's; that is, the fantastic hesitation is the reaction when "an event—an action—occurs which proceeds from the supernatural."²⁶ The fantastic hesitation entraps a character in an "uncertainty" between "an illusion of the senses" and "an integral part of reality."²⁷ Todorov shows that, in effect of a supernatural event, the fantastic occupies ambiguity but does not cause or determine it. It is the Weird threshold that causes and determines the ambiguity experienced, as it does not specially identify the event as real, symbolic or imaginary. Certainly these elements are always present in the event, but it is important to highlight here that the Weird threshold purposely distorts them. Laird Barron, in describing how a reader may distinguish a text as Weird, highlights my claims here about the Weird threshold. Barron gives the description of a "diver in murky depths who spies the last meter of a trailing tentacle and innocently supposes he's apprehended a common specimen of octopi" while "the rest of the mighty Kraken" remains hidden.²⁸ This is the Weird threshold—that is, the precise moment when Barron's diver finds themselves caught between comprehending the tentacle as octopus or monster, as neither or both—it performs the Weird in Weird narrative. As readers we heavily rely upon a character's description of an event to identify it as real, or not. The Weird threshold purposely

distorts and complicates all manifestations of the event that would otherwise categorise a text as gothic, horror or science fiction by participating in them.

The threshold of Weird Fiction allows it, as a genre, to move across multiple boundaries as a corrupted, grotesque body. Weird Fiction relies upon the real, the symbolic and the imagination to announce itself, and this is precisely how the genre crosses multiple genres without belonging to them. What is necessary now is to investigate this function of the Weird threshold in a text constituted as Weird. However, to avoid contributing to an investigation that is led by a masculinist agenda, the following discussion offers a feminist interpretation, specifically dealing with feminist dystopia that works to subvert Old phallogocentrism.

NEW WEIRD FEMINIST DYSTOPIA

The “boys club” of the Old continues to influence how writers of the New are read. For example, claims like Trevor Owen Jones’s that New writers “clearly have zero ‘anxiety of influence,’” are prejudiced and naïve when considered within the frame of a critical and creative *écriture féminine*.²⁹ To avoid contributing to what Hélène Cixous refers to as the “self-conscious re-marking” of women’s minority status, scholarship should not dwell on a woman’s anxiety but rather her attempt to write and make her body heard.³⁰ Similar to the New’s aim of establishing a canon that expands the limitations of Lovecraft’s Weird tale ideal, a feminist dystopia aims “to question the very notion of genre, boundaries, and exclusionary politics” in order “to investigate instead the intersection of gender and generic fiction.”³¹ Cixous warns us of contributions to “*his* torment, his desire to be (at) the origin” in terms of phallogocentrism, and suggests that feminists should bring “to light the fate dealt to woman, her burial—to threaten the stability of the masculine structure that passed itself off as eternal-natural.”³² Therefore, as Sarah Lefanu suggests, feminist dystopias are necessary because they “foreground ... the denial of women’s sexual autonomy” in order to “show women trapped by their sex, by their femaleness, and reduced from subjecthood to function.”³³

To read dystopia and grotesque bodies in Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines* as elements of a Weird threshold offers a sympathetic liberation for contemporary women writers. Carter contributes to an *écriture féminine* that inspires women writers alike, specifically of the New for the purpose of this discussion, to go beyond the limitations "and universalist assumptions about gendered identities: themes such as the representation of women and their bodies."³⁴ The dystopian and grotesque elements of Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines* reveal the limitations of a masculine perspective. Through the ambiguity of women's bodies, Carter offers the capacity to confront the Lovecraftian (Old) limitations as a liberating practice for women. Carter contributes to an *écriture féminine* that, for Cixous, allows women to break "away from the old, and, more precisely, the (feminine) new from the old."³⁵

Carter's novel is an unspecified American post-apocalyptic narrative. Set as a first-person frame narrative that recounts past events, Desiderio narrates his own experiences during his time employed by the Government who had sent him out of the city to find and assassinate Dr Hoffman. Dr Hoffman is responsible for creating a machine that caused the Great War; "a virus which causes a cancer of the mind, so that the cells of the imagination run wild."³⁶ Dr Hoffman's machine runs on eroto-energy generated by "a hundred of the best-matched lovers in the world" kept in "love pen[s]" in an underground chamber of the doctor's mansion.³⁷ Desiderio's own desire overrides the subsequent events of what he calls his "picaresque adventure or even of heroic adventure," in his quest to not only find and assassinate the doctor but also the doctor's daughter, Albertina.³⁸ Albertina plagues Desiderio's dreams and continues to do so even after he kills her along with Dr Hoffman at the end of the novel. Throughout his narrative, Desiderio is confronted by Albertina on multiple occasions although he is not consciously aware of this at the time, despite his desires.

Desiderio's unconscious desire of Albertina is revealed in his interpretation of two characters that become fetishised by his imagination. These two characters showcase what Anna Kérchy refers to as the "*disembodied*, masculinised, universal thinking-subject position" of women, women who are "dis-identified as the essential *other* marked by her unthinkable bodiliness."³⁹ Desiderio finds himself captivated by

Dr Hoffman's ambassador, upon a scheduled meeting, in which he describes the man as: "the most beautiful human being I have ever seen. ... He was a manicured leopard patently in complicity with chaos."⁴⁰ Then again in his travels outside of the city, Desiderio encounters a dandy Count and his young valet, Lefleur, whom Desiderio assumes to be a "mute" and submissive boy.⁴¹ Both of these characters are Albertina who is crossdressing in each instance. For this reason Albertina is not interpreted by Desiderio as grotesque in the classical Bakhtinian definition of "ancient grotesque forms"; that is, "the combination of human and animal traits."⁴²

Before proceeding with how Albertina functions as a corruption in the masculine perspective, a brief explanation of the grotesque is necessary. In *Rabelais and His World* (1984), Mikhail Bakhtin has two chapters dedicated entirely to "Banquet Imagery in Rabelais" and "The Grotesque Image of the Body and Its Sources." Both of these chapters deal with the carnivalesque and how their motifs and themes link them to the celebratory image of the grotesque body. Exaggerated dimensions, according to Bakhtin, are one of the key, if not the most important, characteristics of the grotesque body.⁴³ The grotesque body is stressed by Bakhtin as "body in the act of becoming," building and creating another body to the point of "exaggeration and hyperbolisation," "transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new second body: the bowels and the phallus."⁴⁴ Mary Russo adds to Bakhtin's explanation, specially concentrating on grotesque bodies that are abject, as "open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing; it is identified with non-official 'low' culture or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation."⁴⁵

Due to Desiderio sidelining Albertina through a masculinist perception that creates and perceives her body as male, her femininity is silenced. Or, as Kérchy puts it, "Carter's dystopia maps out spaces of disillusion. Her fantastic landscapes embody ... and evoke representations of suffering femininity."⁴⁶ In other words, although Desiderio's desire is presented to him through Albertina's masculine grotesque body, it is her femininity, her identity as woman that is rejected from the real. Carter contributes to a social transformation that allows women's subversion of the gender binary to exemplify their grotesque bodies through Weird Fiction. With Albertina as

the feminine corruption who is in attempt to create herself anew outside of the limitations of the masculine, Carter helps us to consider women writer's critical and creative efforts in Weird Fiction.

Infernal Desire Machines is a novel that builds upon Lovecraft's Weird tale ideal of "a vague illusion of the strange reality of the unreal";⁴⁷ however, it is women's bodies that are the ambiguous Weird thing. While the novel challenges the representation of women's bodies that have been sidelined by a masculinist gaze, it is in Carter's ability to address and manipulate an illusion as a deception. In so doing, the perceived reality of Desiderio becomes the Weird threshold from which Albertina announces her grotesque body. The Weird threshold reveals itself through Desiderio's masculinist perspective, which allows Albertina to cross through the real and symbolic as a corrupted, grotesque body. By disturbing and crossing through the very boundaries of *his* perceived reality, Albertina is capable of participating without belonging. *Infernal Desire Machines* constructs intertextual links that move beyond Lovecraftian atmosphere to create a desideratum of Weird Fiction. Carter induces a strange variation in an otherwise believable fictional environment, allowing Desiderio to confront a feminist dystopia within the conventions of Weird Fiction, in which the social and political utopia is masculinist.

Carter's novel is a New feminist dystopia concerned with exposing feminine suffering through their repressed bodies. Take, for example, the Amazon tribe that Desiderio, the Count and Lefleur encounter after being shipwrecked on their journey "to abandon everything."⁴⁸ The Amazon tribe is ruled by a chief—a man who is a "very sacred and very monstrous idol"—who builds his army only of women.⁴⁹ These women soldiers, described by Desiderio as "elderly and steatopygous... chosen as much for the size of their bottoms as anything,"⁵⁰ capture them and present them before the village and their chief who orders them to be boiled and skinned. The hierarchy that the Amazon tribe represents is not only male-dominant but pervaded by misogyny and sexual politics of inequality that cuts across class hierarchies. This misogyny is akin to the limitations of the Old Weird. Moreover, these women soldiers, as the chief explains, are chosen purely on the basis that masculinist perceptions of the

Mother are wrong, and in fact women are “vengeful as nature herself.”⁵¹ Furthermore, each woman soldier of his army has been castrated in order to castrate her “capacity for feeling.”⁵² This “feeling” can be read as fear of feminine expression. The chief is the dominant masculine authority who not only places and accumulates the enigma of women’s bodies, he actively expresses his fear through castrating women. This is the limitation of masculine authority and perspective, for it fears dominance and thereby eliminates women’s ability of corruption. However, Carter’s novel works to subvert this dominance precisely through women’s expression of the grotesque bodies given to them by the masculine.

Another significant element of the grotesquery presented by the Amazon women’s bodies is that they are never confirmed or recognised by Desiderio as grotesque. This signifies women’s suffering which has been forced upon them by the masculine authority. The Amazon women escape Desiderio’s desire because their identities and desires as women have been castrated by masculinist fear. Carter further complements this escape of masculine desire with Albertina’s literal identification as woman:

Two privates seized Lefleur’s shoulders and dragged him away from me. They cut off his robe, although he struggled, and I saw not the lean torso of a boy but the gleaming, curvilinear magnificence of a golden woman whose flesh seemed composed of the sunlight that touched it far more kindly than the black hands of the fiendish infantry did. I recognised her even before they sheared away the bandages and showed no noseless, ulcerated, disfigured face but the face of Albertina herself.⁵³

Upon boiling the Count alive, the chief instructs his army to seize Lefleur. Up to this point Desiderio had believed Lefleur to be male, and it is not until the Amazon women, women castrated and therefore not capable of transformation, “sheared away the bandages” to reveal “the gleaming, curvilinear magnificence of a golden woman” that Desiderio recognises and identifies as his desired Albertina. I agree with Mandy Koolen, who suggests that the instance of Albertina’s mutation of “genders serves to

disrupt [this] active male/passive female binary as 'she' often embodies maleness and femaleness, activity and passivity," because Albertina is imitating "Desiderio's 'queer' desires in order to assume guises that she knows he will find alluring."⁵⁴ Albertina, because she is subject of Desiderio's desire, can manipulate masculinist fear, thereby offering her an opportunity to make a distinction between her identity as a woman and her oppressive gender identification as presented within his particular illusion of her identity. Carter's feminist dystopia seizes this revealing and transformation as an opportunity for women in their suffering, vulnerable femininity. Albertina seizes her identity as woman in order to overwrite and rewrite Desiderio's perception, consciously rupturing phallogocentric limitation and confinement.

Albertina's seizing of her feminine body is emphasised after their escape from the Amazons. Desiderio and Albertina are found by a herd of centaurs whose bodies are half horse, half human, which classifies them within the traditional definition of a grotesque body. It is these bodies that are recognised by Desiderio as grotesque. It is within this grotesque recognition where feminine suffering is dominant and apparent, or, as Desiderio acknowledges it, the centaurs believed women "were born only to suffer," that Albertina seizes her femininity.⁵⁵ This inflicts something more than feminine suffering, it offers a liberating practice *for* women:

At the back of my mind flickered a teasing image, that of a young girl trampled by horses. I could not remember when or where I had seen it, such a horrible thing; but it was the most graphic and haunting of memories and a voice in my mind ... told me that I was somehow, all unknowing, the instigator of this horror. My pain and agitation increased beyond all measure.⁵⁶

Albertina is raped by the male centaurs, to which Desiderio "could do nothing but watch and suffer."⁵⁷ For Albertina, self-blame, "pain" and "agitation" become the threshold of a masculine New imagination. Albertina believes "that even though every male in the village had obtained carnal knowledge of her, the beasts were still only emanations of her own desires, dredged up and objectively reified from the dark

abysses of the unconscious” according to her father’s, Dr Hoffman’s, theory of desire.⁵⁸ Albertina rejects Desiderio’s disillusionment of reality in order to reimagine the violation of her femininity back through the barriers of the unreal, or, in this case Desiderio’s self-blame for her rape by the masculine. Her body here is the emphasis that indicates the story’s significant production of the Weird threshold. Women’s bodies within the New are a site that Fisher claims “de-naturalis[e] all worlds, by exposing their instability, their openness to the outside.”⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

This is Carter’s Weird feminist dystopia where the desperation to normalise and reclaim women within grotesquery magnifies and penetrates women’s silence. The Amazon and centaur examples anticipate the strange reality of the unreal, placing and accumulating the obsession with the enigma of fear of women’s bodies. Albertina is capable of creating herself anew by going beyond the masculine perception and reality. Therefore, by linking Carter’s feminist dystopia to Weird Fiction in this sense, where the fear of women’s bodies is transformed in women’s act of becoming, expand the limitations of Lovecraft’s Weird tale ideal that had previously sidelined them. Carter’s *Infernal Desire Machines* highlights not only masculine fear of desire and femininity, but also, in Carter’s feminist dystopia, an opportunity for women to transform and recover their silenced identities as women. Although at the end of the novel, Albertina is killed by Desiderio, it is worth considering Albertina’s lingering presence, not just as a feminist dystopia that imagines women’s repressed creative expression within the specific context of the Weird, but as I have suggested: The experimental capacity of a feminist mode is a way of writing that confronts phallic structures of organisation (that is Lovecraft’s Weird tale ideal) as a liberating practice that opens multiple opportunities for women to seize back their identity, their voice and their bodies. The implication of Albertina’s death is one worth considering not as a literal death caused by masculine authority, rather as an expression of their silence and a way forward for women’s writing. The *écriture féminine* that Carter contributes

to not only writes against the phallogocentric conditions set by the Old, but to the New's experimental nature that troubles and expands the current critical scholarship.

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NOTES

¹ I capitalise Weird Fiction as a "determination of being in presence, or in beingness," a *différance* that "commands nothing, rules over nothing, and nowhere does it exercise any authority." Weird Fiction is marked with capital letters because it draws authority of beingness. Moreover, my use of Weird authorises it as both and neither Old and New. Jacques Derrida, "Difference," in *Literary Interpretation: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin et al. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 293.

² I use the concept of phallogocentrism with reference to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and critique of Jacques Lacan who he accuses as "both phallogocentric, in naming the Phallus as the centre of the Symbolic Order, and logocentric, in naming the Phallus as the source and origin of language." Mary Klages, *Key Terms in Literary Theory* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 65.

³ Throughout this paper I refer to "Lovecraft's weird tale ideal" as a term that describes what Lovecraft "wished" Weird Fiction to be, rather than what is argued in critical scholarship. Lovecraft's weird tale ideal refers to *his* notion of Weird Fiction.

⁴ The term "New Weird" was coined by M. John Harrison in a 2003 "Message Board" which created a discussion between likeminded writers and critics. Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, "New Weird Discussions: The Creation of a Term," in *The New Weird* (San Francisco: Tachyon

Publications, 2008), 317.

⁵ I wish to highlight that this paper is specific to Weird Fiction and its respective critical scholarship. My research treats Weird Fiction as a genre proper and therefore not as gothic, horror, science fiction or any other genre from which it claims faithful participation.

⁶ Michael Kelly, "Foreword," in *Year's Best Weird Fiction*, vol. 1, ed. Michael Kelly et al. (Pickering: Undertow Publications, 2014), 7.

⁷ Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy, "Introduction: Old and New Weird," *Genre* 49, no.2 (2016): 119.

⁸ Michael Moorcock, "Foreweird," in *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*, ed. Ann VanderMeer et al. (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2011), xiii.

⁹ Moorcock, "Foreweird," xiii.

¹⁰ It is often pointed out that Carter is not identified by critical scholarship as a Weird Fiction author. However, given that Carter (and the women writers that I list) is listed here by Moorcock in a Weird Fiction anthology that exclusively deals with Weird stories, suggests that there are identifiable Weird elements in Carter's work. These "identifiable Weird elements" will be discussed in more detail further on, for it deserves more than a mere mention.

¹¹ Moorcock, "Foreweird," xv.

¹² Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016), 16.

¹³ Fisher, *The Weird*, 17.

¹⁴ H. P. Lovecraft, "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction," *The H. P. Lovecraft Archive*, last modified October 20, 2009, <http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/nwwf.aspx>.

¹⁵ Sunand Tryambak Joshi, *The Modern Weird Tale* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2001), 1.

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³⁹ Kérchy, *Body-Texts*, 39.

⁴⁰ Carter, *Doctor Hoffman*, 31.

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⁴² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Moscow: Midland, 1984), 316.

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(1894), where Schneegans gives three examples of the comic: the clownish, the burlesque, and the grotesque. Bakhtin rejects Schneegans' theories because he "fails to analyse the character of exaggeration, which often undergoes sharp transformations in quality." Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 304, 307.

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